



Pictured, from left, are: John Wilson, Paul Monette, Robert Gosselin, and Denis Chenette. Mr. Gosselin has made it his mission for the past five years to collect wreaths to lay on the graves of each fallen veteran on Pearl Harbor Day.

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Wreaths distributed in memory of veterans

by David Dudley

NEWPORT — For the past five years, Robert Gosselin has made it his mission to place a wreath on the grave of every veteran in Orleans County.

This year was no different. A trailer full of wreaths was hooked up to Mr. Gosselin's truck, and the bed of the truck was already full of wreaths as he pulled up to the flagpole in Gardner Park Saturday morning.

"We collected 800 wreaths this year," Mr. Gosselin said. "It's well short of our goal of 2,300, but we'll take what we can get."

About 80 volunteers would be Mr. Gosselin's accomplices. Together, they would take as many wreaths as they could carry and fan out to visit each cemetery in Orleans County on the day before the seventy-third anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

But before they made those visits, Mr. Gosselin was joined by John Wilson, president of the Newport City Council; Paul Monette, mayor of Newport; and Newport City Councilman Denis Chenette. They gathered before the memorial, and offered a few words on what they, as a community, were about to do.

"This is a solemn day," Mr. Gosselin began. "Apart from the sacrifices these brave men and women made, some of you may learn of the deaths of friends and relatives that you didn't know about."

Mr. Gosselin went on to tell the story of a man who had, the year before, gone out to place wreaths on the graves.

"He placed a wreath on one grave," Mr. Gosselin said. "And, when he looked down at the very next stone, he discovered that it belonged to his friend from 20 years

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"We have to remember them"

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ago. The man always wondered what happened to his friend, and now he knew that he had died.

"That really hit home."

Roger Cartee, former DECA advisor at North Country Union High School (NCUHS), got the idea of laying wreaths on veterans' graves in 2002.

"I read an article about Wreaths Across America," Mr. Cartee said via phone. "Their mission was to lay a wreath on the grave of every veteran in America. Lots of veterans, dead or alive, seem to be forgotten around the holidays; I felt they needed to be remembered and appreciated."

Mr. Cartee and his DECA students started small. They took as many wreaths as they could get, and chose one cemetery to decorate on an annual basis.

At the time, Mr. Gosselin was donating the wreaths through his business, Spates the Florist.

When Mr. Cartee retired from North Country Mr. Gosselin stepped up to keep the project alive.

"It just made sense for me to keep it going," Mr. Gosselin said. "I'm in the wreath business, after all."

But he wasn't content to visit one cemetery a year. Instead, he set out to get a wreath on the grave of every veteran in the county, about 2,300 of them.

"Bob's expanded a lot," Mr. Cartee said, referring to Mr. Gosselin. "He tries to cover them all."

Of course, to do that Mr. Gosselin depends upon donations from all over.

Two of his biggest sponsors are the Newport Rotary Club, and, this year, the fifth-grade class at Newport City School, which raised \$800.

Last year, enough money was raised for 1,400 wreaths.

"They really aren't getting the corporate

sponsorship they need," Mr. Cartee said. "That, and we're in a low-income area. Certainly there's a question of what to do with the limited resources that are available for veterans."

"We tried really hard to get the word out," Mr. Gosselin said. "But the economy isn't so good. People are having to make do with less and less."

"Still, we'll do the best we can. For some cemeteries, we'll leave a single wreath on the

gates. Those vets won't be forgotten. We'll do whatever it takes to keep putting wreaths on the ground. And, when that fails, we'll at least keep those veterans in our minds and hearts."

"We have to remember them," Mr. Wilson said. "The sacrifices they made for us. That's why we have what we have. If it weren't for them, we may not be here today."

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